



AETC News Clips

Lackland AFB, Texas



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4 orphaned sisters getting a brighter Christmas

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Socorro Moreno had planned to take her four daughters to her sister's house on Christmas Eve to eat turkey and tamales and open gifts at midnight.

And as she left for work the morning of Oct. 31, she hoped to get home early to help her girls celebrate Halloween.

But fate had other plans. Moreno, 31, and two other women died when their car struck a barrier near the Lackland AFB gate on Valley Hi Drive.

Active-duty, reserve and civilian personnel at Lackland have since raised \$3,500 for Moreno's daughters, who went shopping Tuesday at Ingram Park Mall.

Maria Moreno, Socorro's sister, now cares for the girls, along with her own sons, 16 and 17. With the girls' father having committed suicide last year, their mom's death left them parentless.



Lisa Krantz/Express-News

Genesis Perez, 4, looks at the toys she and her sisters picked at Ingram Park Mall.

"My sister used to bring them here" to the mall, said Maria Moreno, 36, a hospital employee who lives in a three-bedroom home and is saving up for a four-bedroom house.

The girls didn't have the happy Halloween their mother had hoped for. But they'll have all the Christmas gifts they want. And money left over from Christmas will go into trust funds for them.

"We're giving them the best Christmas ever. They deserve it," their aunt said.

The oldest girl, Amanda Ytuarte, 14, picked out a PlayStation Portable.

"That was one of the two things I wanted," along with an iPod, which she's been told she'll get at Christmas, said Amanda, who is said to look a lot like her mom.

Her 10-year-old sister Brittany Moreno-Perez insisted the gifts be wrapped so the family can observe their annual tradition after baking and eating cookies.

"And then we open all our presents at 12 o'clock," she said.

Also handpicking clothes, dolls, games and toys were Jasmine Moreno-Perez, 11, and the youngest girl, Genesis Perez, 4 — the one her mother would call "Sugarmama" or "Princess."

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Their mother, who grew up in the Harlandale area, was a contract food server at the 321st Training Squadron dining hall. She's remembered as a kind young woman who'd often give double servings.

Because Lackland is the Air Force's home of basic training, her smile helped trainees get through the six-week course, said Master Sgt. Kenneth Fowler, first sergeant of the 321st.

"To trainees, it means everything to have that exposure to a little kindness," he said.

Master Sgt. Janice Allen said Lackland employees have felt a bond with the girls since the Oct. 31 crash, which also killed the car's driver, Veronica Brown, 43, and Georgina Johnson, 50. Though the cause was undetermined, Brown's relatives have said she might have had an epileptic seizure.

Lackland firefighters were the first to see the bodies.

"It tore them up really bad," Allen said. "Once we figured out who it was, we tried to get as much information as we could to see what we could do."

So Maria Moreno is hoping to give her nieces some joy at Christmas, even as she copes with her own grief. No matter how many gifts are opened, cookies baked or tamales eaten, one very special thing will be missing, she said.

"I just hold myself up."